Government of Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan Centennial 2005

Our Children. Our Promise. Our Future.

Early Childhood Development Progress Report 2003/2004

105-03936/

Contents

Message from the Ministers. 2

Executive Summary. 3

Introduction 4

An Investment in Our Future 6

Impact on Society 8

Early Learning and Care 11

Prekindergarten 13

Early Childhood Intervention Program 14

Infant Mortality Risk Reduction Initiatives 15

KidsFirst Program Progress 2003-04. 16

The Path Forward - Early Childhood Development 20

Summary of Investments – 2003-04 21

Investments in Early Learning and Care – 2003-04. 22

Appendix A: KidsFirst. 24

For further information, contact:

Early Childhood Development
Saskatchewan Learning
2220 College Avenue, First floor
Regina, Saskatchewan S4P 3V7
Phone: (306) 787-5077
Fax: (306) 798-0787
www.sasklearning.gov.sk.ca

national children's agenda

Message from the Ministers

Of all the investments a society can make for its future, the nurturing of young children is perhaps the most crucial. Over and over again, research is showing that the quality of experience children have early in life is highly significant to their long term success and happiness. The Government of Saskatchewan is committed to providing all of our province's young children, and their families, with the support and encouragement they need to thrive.

The Early Childhood Development (ECD) Strategy, approved in 2000, continues to bring together resources, knowledge and programming from a variety of sectors. The ECD Strategy's goal is to provide a coordinated, comprehensive approach to assist vulnerable families to nurture their children on all levels - physically, emotionally, socially and intellectually.

Through KidsFirst, the first program initiative implemented under the ECD Strategy, the Government is striving to work with vulnerable families in a way that is respectful and culturally sensitive. In coordination with the Departments of Health, Learning, Community Resources and Employment, and First Nations and Metis Relations, the ECD Strategy supports and builds on existing programs for vulnerable families and their children.

Early learning and care is an integral part of the ECD Strategy. The Government is committed to creating a coordinated approach to early learning and care that will meet the needs of Saskatchewan's children.

The Early Childhood Development Progress Report 2003-04 describes in detail the progress made under the ECD Strategy to bring about a positive difference in the lives of Saskatchewan's youngest and most vulnerable citizens. We believe that all children deserve the best possible start in life. We believe that investment in the early years of life is a sound investment in Saskatchewan's future.

Joanne Crofford
Minister of Community Resources and Employment

John T. Nilson, Q.C.
Minister of Health

Andrew Thomson
Minister of Learning

Executive Summary

The Government of Saskatchewan is pleased to present its third annual Progress Report on Early Childhood Development (ECD). This Report informs the Saskatchewan public of the investments and progress made on the province's Early Childhood Development Strategy during 2003-04.

This report begins with a look at the economic benefits of ECD programs and how these investments make sound economic sense. Research in neuroscience is showing a clear link between optimal brain development and a child's experiences in the first five years of life. Research also indicates that return on investment is greatest between birth and age five and lessens as children grow older.

This report also looks at how investments in ECD fit into the government's broader social policies. It provides an overview of factors that affect the health, development and well-being of Saskatchewan children, particularly the high number of vulnerable Aboriginal children. The Government is committed to working with children within the context of their families and communities. As with other initiatives such as Building Independence and School^{PLUS}, Saskatchewan is targeting supports to Aboriginal children and their families. Working with Aboriginal families in respectful, culturally-relevant ways is the key to improving outcomes for this population.

KidsFirst, the first program initiative implemented under the ECD Strategy, reached full operation in 2003-04. KidsFirst provides an intensive home visiting program and a range of supports and referrals to vulnerable families, including pregnant women and children up to age five. In 2003-04, 849 families participated in the program. Screening for KidsFirst was done on 81.6 percent of all births in the nine targeted communities. The child care and early learning components of KidsFirst continued to grow. Parent support programs continued in all the communities. By the end of the fiscal year, all nine sites were offering the core components of the program and many sites had reached the maximum number of families they could accommodate.

Early learning and care is an important part of Saskatchewan's ECD Strategy. The Government is committed to creating a comprehensive, coordinated approach that will meet the needs of Saskatchewan's most vulnerable children. In 2003-04, Saskatchewan continued its investment in Early learning and care, with a total commitment of $9.6 Million in Child Care Grants, and an increase of more than 600 licensed child care spaces from 2002-03.

Saskatchewan's Prekindergarten Program, established in 1996-97, provides quality early learning experiences to preschool-age children in 100 sites across the province. Since then the program has expanded. In 2003-04, $200,000 of ECD funding was allocated to support Prekindergarten programs in an additional four communities.

The Early Childhood Intervention Program, which serves children with disabilities, received $370,000 of ECD funding for 108 spaces. These new spaces are available to children with developmental delays or those at risk for delay.

In 2003-04, Saskatchewan Health received $70,000 of ECD funding to continue work on the Infant Mortality Risk Reduction Initiative. This Initiative provides programming in five regions.

In total in 2003-04, $9.8 Million was provided to nine KidsFirst sites in Saskatchewan. An additional $2.9 Million was provided for related programming, including infant mortality risk reduction, child care, special needs services, Prekindergarten and program development and support.

Introduction

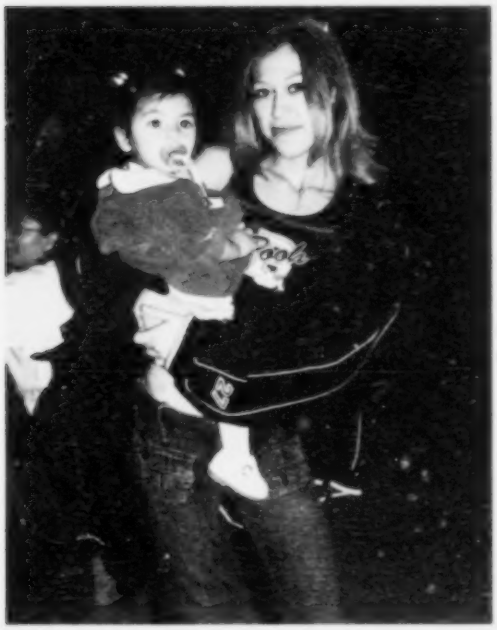
In September 2000, First Ministers from across the country met and agreed upon a joint Early Childhood Development (ECD) framework. Their commitment to the nation's children is reflected in the communiqué released following that meeting:

> *'First Ministers affirm their commitment to the well-being of children by setting out their vision of early childhood development as an investment in the future of Canada. Canada's future social vitality and economic prosperity depends on the opportunities that are provided to children today.'*

As a result of this meeting, First Ministers committed their governments to strengthening early childhood development programming. In return, the federal government agreed to commit additional funding ($3.2 Billion by 2007-08) to support this work. For Saskatchewan, this commitment will provide almost $100 Million over seven years.

The First Minister's communiqué on ECD was followed, in March 2003, by a Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care that was approved by Federal, Provincial, and Territorial Minister of Social Services. The Federal government committed an additional $1 Billion ($32 Million for Saskatchewan) for the five year period 2003-2008. These two Federal/Provincial/ Territorial initiatives have significantly enhanced the province's ability to move forward on early childhood development as well as early learning and child care.

An effective response to early childhood needs requires collaboration among the health, social services and education systems. A management team, comprised of representatives from the departments of Health, Learning, First Nations and Metis Relations, and Community Resources and Employment, oversees development and implementation of the Provincial ECD strategy.



Early learning and care is an important part of Saskatchewan's ECD Strategy. The Government of Saskatchewan is committed to creating a comprehensive, coordinated approach to early learning and care which will meet the needs of Saskatchewan's most vulnerable children. In 2003-04, continuing investments in wages and professional development for early childhood educators were made and funds were provided for start-up and equipment grants in licensed family childcare centres across the province.

The 2003-04 Progress Report is the third in a series of reports that will help to inform the public about Saskatchewan's Early Childhood Development and Early Learning and Care strategies and the efforts of communities to ensure that vulnerable children have a good start in life. The programs and expenditures outlined in the progress reports are in addition to the many other services offered in Saskatchewan to assist children and their families.

An Investment in Our Future

Research in neuroscience shows a clear link between brain development and a child's quality of life in the first five years. The negative effects of lack of quality of experiences and care are cumulative and become evident in problems with cognitive, emotional, physical and social development of children. These problems may not be as visible in the early years, but hinder an individual's ability to reach his or her full potential later in life.

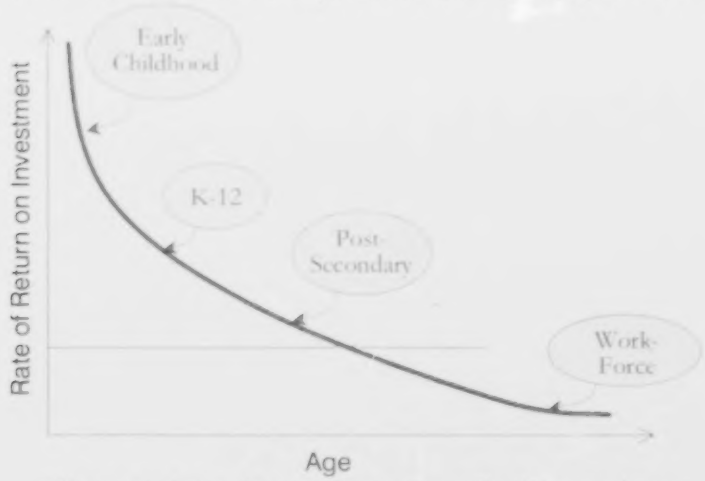
Current research supports investment in early childhood development and shows that investments in the early years pay the biggest dividends. Return on investment is greatest between birth and age five and becomes less as the child ages. The literature on early childhood development indicates that preschool children who attend high quality early childhood education and care programs are more likely to become productive members of

---

'In today's world, where education and skill levels determine future earnings, the economic and social costs to individuals, communities, and the nation of not taking action on early childhood education are far too great to ignore, especially when the benefits far outweigh the costs.'

(Charlie Coffey, Economics of Early Childhood Development and Care: The cost of not doing enough, *ww.rbc.com/newsroom/20040601coffey.html)*

Rate of Return for Human Capital Investments During the Life Course



- Human capital accumulation is a dynamic process. The skills acquired in one stage of the life cycle affect learning at the next stage.
- Remediation of early childhood opportunities is very expensive.

Dr. David Trefler, Rotman School of Management

Rate of Return for Human Capital Investments across the Life Cycle

society as adults. Quality early learning and care programs not only protect children's health and safety, but also help them develop their full potential.

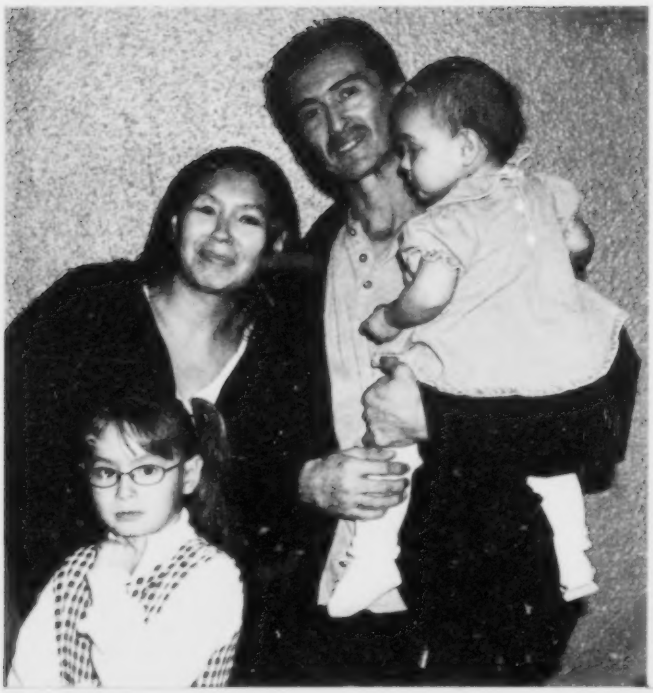
For every dollar invested in early childhood development, the minimum return to society is three-fold. Research from the Child Care Education Foundation indicates it costs Canada $2.5 Billion every year for remedial education due to delayed development in early childhood. These delays include physical, cognitive and emotional aspects of human development.

It is commonly accepted that it is society's responsibility to protect the rights of children, to educate children, and to encourage all citizens to achieve their full potential. Research consistently makes it clear that society's return on investment is greater when those investments are made early in life. Early investments also lay the groundwork for greater returns from later education. Supporting early childhood development provides economic and social benefits for future generations.

'The returns to human capital investments are greatest for the young for two reasons:

- *(a) younger persons have a longer horizon over which to recoup the fruits of their investments and*
- *(b) skill begets skill.*

(Heckman, p. 39, 2000, Policies to Foster Human Capital. *Chicago: Irving B. Harris, Graduate School of Public Policy Studies, University of Chicago).*



Impact on Society

For most individuals and families, the existence of government policy or the concept of service integration are not given much thought. Their interest is primarily in achieving for themselves the elements of a good life: a happy childhood, a good education, work they enjoy, family, a home, and good health. Achieving these involves support from others around them: including extended family and friends, community, and occasionally, government. It is important that government policies and programs help families become better equipped to meet their challenges, and that they can rely on others in the community to assist them. As well, government supports the need to be respectful of and responsive to family needs.

In developing early childhood development policy and programs, the Government of Saskatchewan is committed to meeting the needs of children and their families. Within this overall agenda, there is a need for a specific focus on Aboriginal families. In 2001, over 13 percent of Saskatchewan's population was Aboriginal; among the highest in Canada. About half the Aboriginal population in Saskatchewan is under the age of 20. In 2001, 27.4 percent of Saskatchewan preschoolers were of Aboriginal ancestry. (Saskatchewan Education Indicators, 2002).

It is crucial to Saskatchewan's future that children and their families have access to supportive, respectful, and culturally relevant early childhood development programs. Early intervention has been shown to result in long-term benefits for children, such as improved educational attainment and performance, increased employment, reduced involvement in the criminal justice system and better health.

In a number of areas related to early childhood development, progress has been made, but it is clear that many challenges remain. An update regarding the progress and challenges is outlined below.

Readiness to Learn

Enhanced support for early learning and child care is increasingly regarded as essential to healthy child development and a productive adult life. Over the last several years, Saskatchewan has been improving supports which prepare children for success in school.

Increased availability of Prekindergarten programs, numbers of licensed child care spaces, and KidsFirst programming help support families in child development and school readiness. Prekindergarten programs are based on research that shows early intervention to support vulnerable children is much more effective than intervention during middle school or high school.

Educational Achievement

International assessments, such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Program for International Student Achievement 2000 show Saskatchewan to be a world leader in providing equitable education across socio-economic levels. In Saskatchewan, the difference in scores between students of high and low socio-economic status was second lowest among the 31 countries and 10 provinces participating.

Overall, education levels have increased. Nonetheless, a significant gap remains between the levels of educational attainment of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population. In 2001, 62 percent of Aboriginal people aged 25 - 44 had at least high school and/or some post-

secondary education, much lower than the 78.6 percent rate for the non-Aboriginal population. (Saskatchewan Education Indicators, 2002). Further, the percentage of Saskatchewan Aboriginal students who complete Grade 12 is increasing. Almost 80 percent of the total population of Saskatchewan students complete Grade 12. However, for Aboriginal students this rate is slightly more than 50 percent. (Saskatchewan Education Indicators, 2002). While this is an improvement from past years, a significant gap remains between the level of educational attainment of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

Family Income and Employment

The financial circumstances of low-income families are improving. But Aboriginal low-income families continue to lag behind the income levels of the general population. The incidence of low income in Saskatchewan overall in 2000 was much higher for Aboriginal families than it was for non-Aboriginal families: 43 percent compared to nine percent (Statistics Canada, December 2001). Average income for Aboriginal people has increased by 25 percent from 1995 to 2000, but these income levels are still at 54 percent of that of non-Aboriginal people in 1995, and 59 percent in 2000. (Statistics Canada, December 2001).

In Saskatchewan, youth reliance on social assistance has been decreasing steadily since 1999, and employment rates for youth have improved. Aboriginal youth, however, continue to have a higher rate of reliance on social assistance, a lower rate of labour force participation and a higher unemployment rate than non-Aboriginal youth. More attention is being devoted towards engaging Aboriginal youth in the labour market, including supports for transitions to work.

Children in Care

The stresses of poverty sometimes make it difficult for parents to cope. Children may suffer from neglect and abuse as a result.

Between 1995 and 2000, more than 66 percent of families receiving some form of child protection services were on social assistance. Aboriginal people continue to be over-represented in child protection services, including children in care of the Department of Community Resources and Employment. Aboriginal children and youth continue to make

'Early childhood development programs for pre-school children within primary schools have been proposed as a way not only to enhance early developmental experiences, but also as a way to connect children and their families to local schools.'

(McCain and Mustard, 1999, 2002).

up over two-thirds of children in care. Frequently, disability in a child or parent is a factor in this over-representation.

Safe and Inclusive Communities

Healthy, supportive communities play a key role in building the capacity of Saskatchewan families. Families are shaped by the physical and community environments in which they live. Research is providing evidence that growing up in a community that is perceived to have high levels of cohesion, stability and social supports will lead to healthier child development.

Lower income families are more likely to face challenges finding this kind of stable, supportive community in which to live and raise children. In 1996, 35 percent of Aboriginal households in Saskatchewan were considered unacceptable based on a Statistics Canada survey of "core housing need." This compared to 13 percent of non-Aboriginal households in need. Measurement of core housing need considers affordability, overcrowding, and the condition of the dwelling. According to the 2001 Aborig nal Peoples Survey, 18 percent of Aboriginal people in Saskatoon and 15 percent of Aboriginal people in Regina live in overcrowded housing. Additionally, two thirds of Saskatchewan's Aboriginal people live in rental housing.

Early Learning and Care

The 2002-03 Early Childhood Development Progress Report provided the baseline information on early learning and the 2003-04 report builds on that baseline. Funding and child care spaces are outlined on page 22 of this report.

Saskatchewan is committed to creating a comprehensive, coordinated approach to early learning and care. Our efforts are consistent with those of many other provinces and countries. There is growing recognition that a more strategic approach to early learning and care is a benefit to both families and society as a whole.

The Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care was agreed to by federal, provincial and territorial Ministers Responsible for Social Services in March 2003. It underlines the intention of governments in Canada to begin moving towards a more integrated approach and provides support for the direction Saskatchewan is taking.

The quality of child care programs is improved when they are able to attract and retain qualified early childhood educators. Early Childhood Development (ECD) funding of $519,000 was invested in 2003-04 to assist licensed child care centres to improve wages for early childhood educators. Additionally, $500,000 of ECD funding supported enchancements to quality child care. These enhancements included:

- funding for professional development activities for family child care providers and early childhood educators;
- increased start up funds to encourage new developments in licensed family child care; and
- expansion of equipment grants to enhance developmental programming in family child care.

Child Day Care

For the 75,000 children in the province under six years of age, there are about 5,800 licensed child care spaces in licensed child care centres and family child care homes. Spaces account for approximately 7.7 percent of children not yet in school full-time. About half of all licensed child care spaces are used by families who receive a subsidy to help pay for the services, 87 percent of whom are single parent families.

What happened in 2003-04 to improve early learning and care in this sector? Saskatchewan announced a four-year child care space development plan called *Child Care Saskatchewan* to support labour force attachment and early childhood development. Government committed to develop 1,200 licensed child care spaces over four years. This is the largest increase to child care in the province's history. The increases include:

- 500 new licensed child care spaces in the 2003-04 fiscal year, about half subsidized;
- Early Childhood Services grant funding to 250 existing spaces, previously unfunded, effective April 1, 2003;

- capital funding for building development, renovations and fire and safety requirements associated with these spaces;
- An increase in Early Childhood Services grant to address wage and human resource requirements in the new spaces; and
- An increase in child care subsidies effective June 1, 2003.

With the projected increase in federal funding between 2003 and 2008, Saskatchewan will develop plans for further investments in early learning and child care. The following chart illustrates federal investments, new child care spaces and funds available for investment.

Child Care Saskatchewan established a target of 500 new spaces for 2003-04. KidsFirst also had a target of 113 spaces for a total target increase of 613 spaces. As of March 31, 2004, there was a net increase of 627 licensed child care spaces – 417 new centre spaces and 210 additional home spaces.

Four Year Plan	Federal. ELC Funds	Committed-Child Care Sask	New Spaces Child Care	New Spaces Kids First	Total Spaces	Funds to be invested
2003-04	0.8M	2.8M	500	81	7,896	–
2004-05	4.7	3.8	200	22	8,118	0.9M
2005-06	6.9	4.5	250		8,368	2.4
2006-07	9.2	5.3	250		8,618	3.9
2007-08	10.6	5.4	–		–	5.2
TOTALS	**$32.2M**	**$21.8M**	**1,200**	**103**	**8,618**	**$12.4M**

The 10 percent increase is due in part to the popularity of the Group Family Child Care Home which offers up to four more spaces per home than regular family child care. Fiscal year 2003-04 saw a net loss of 88 regular family child care spaces, more than offset with a net increase of 298 group family child care spaces. Group family child care spaces now represent one third of the total licensed home spaces.

Prekindergarten

In 1996-97, Saskatchewan Learning's Prekindergarten program was established in partnership with school divisions that participate in the Community Schools Program. In 2003-04, there were 104 Prekindergarten programs supported by Saskatchewan Learning and provincial School divisions with up to 16 children in each program.

Prekindergarten is targeted to three and four year olds. Drawing on Saskatchewan's Kindergarten curriculum as its foundation, the program incorporates additional elements and adapts others to meet the needs of very young children living in vulnerable circumstances.

Specifically, early intervention Prekindergarten focuses on:

- fostering social development and self esteem;
- nurturing educational growth and school success;
- promoting language development; and
- involving families.

In 2003-04, $200,000 of Early Childhood Development funding was allocated for Prekindergaten programs in non-targeted communities. Using social, health and economic indicators, four communities with significant numbers of vulnerable preschool children were selected: Estevan, Melfort, Swift Current and Weyburn. Individual communities received $50,000 annually to operate the program. A total of 61 children and their families received support through the four Prekindergarten programs.

Additional support services offered through Prekindergarten in 2003-04 included: parent supports, transportation, speech and language, nutrition, dental and public health, family literacy, music and swimming programs.

'My daughter's social skills and self-esteem have grown rapidly this year. Before entering Prekindergarten, my daughter was unable to interact with other children. Now she's excited each day to go and play with her friends. Her language has also progressed nicely this year. Overall, being in the program has benefited her greatly.'

Parent in Estevan Prekindergarten

Early Childhood Intervention Program

As has been stated earlier in this Progress Report, the earliest years of a child's life are critical to success in later life. This is as true for children with physical and cognitive disabilities as it is for all children.

In Saskatchewan, Early Childhood Intervention Programs (ECIPs) were established in the early 1980s to provide home-based support to families of children with an array of disabilities or who were at risk of delayed development. The focus of the intervention was:

- to educate parents on the nature of their child's disability;
- to develop an intervention plan in conjunction with the parents; and
- to assist parents in implementing the intervention plan to maximize their child's development during the first five years of life.

Today, there are 16 community-based, non-profit ECIPs operating in Saskatchewan. Fifty-five Early Interventionists serve 696 children, birth to school age, and their families. These Interventionists meet with families in their homes approximately twice a month to develop an intervention plan and provide ongoing support, monitoring and assessment. As well, Early Interventionists provide a valuable link between families and other professionals including speech and language pathologists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, teachers, nurses and medical specialists. Many parents have commented on their appreciation for these interventions as they tie together a daily support and intervention plan for their children.

Early Childhood Interventionists also assist in the transition to school. They work closely with teachers and parents, using their knowledge of the child's strengths and challenges to assist in developmental and educational plans.

On an annual basis, Early Interventionists assess the developmental gains of children, using the Diagnostic Inventory Screening of Children (DISC) assessment tool. As well, ECIPs invite parent evaluation and feedback through parent surveys.

108 New Spaces Funded

In each of 2002-03 and 2003-04, $370,000 of the Early Childhood Development (ECD) funding was allocated to address a growing waiting list of children with developmental delays or those at risk for delay who would benefit from the Home-Based ECIPs. All 16 non-profit ECIPS across the province were invited to apply for funding to provide support and intervention to children on their waiting lists. Funding for 108 new spaces was directed to those agencies with children at greatest risk and in greatest need of support.

The following agencies received additional funding for new spaces: Meadow Lake and Area ECIP; Battlefords ECIP; Prince Albert ECIP; South East ECIP, Redvers; Alvin Buckwold ECIP, Saskatoon Inc.; Swift Current and District ECIP; North East ECIP, Tisdale; Weyburn and area ECIP; Parkland ECIP, Yorkton; Children North ECIP, LaRonge; and Wecihik Awasisak Help the Children, Ile a la Crosse.

The investment in ECIPs across Saskatchewan addresses the following three of the four action areas under the ECD Agreement:

- strengthens early childhood development, learning and care;
- improves parenting and family supports; and
- strengthens community supports.

Infant Mortality Risk Reduction Initiatives

In Saskatchewan and across Canada, infant mortality rates have dropped significantly over the last 20 years. In 1979, the infant mortality rate in Saskatchewan was 11.4 per 1,000 live births. In 2002, the figure was 5.7 per 1,000 live births. In 2003-04, the infant mortality risk reduction initiatives continued to promote healthy pregnancy, infancy and birth.

In 2001-02, Saskatchewan Health identified five health regions that had high infant mortality rates and limited program and resource support:

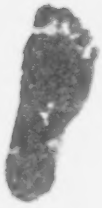
- Mamawetan-Churchill River;
- Keewatin Yatthe;
- Heartland;
- Prince Albert Parkland; and
- Athabasca Health Authority.

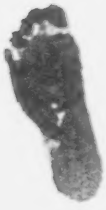
In 2003-04, the regions continued with the activities beginning in 2002-03, including:

- Northern regions: nutritional education support for vulnerable prenatal women and families; educational resource material regarding health and pregnancy, parenting; Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and other alcohol-related disorders, addictions, injuries, and capacity building
- Prince Albert Parkland: training on appropriate and timely prenatal referral and parenting training
- Heartland: workshops and training on targeting teen pregnancy; capacity building for prenatal referral/postnatal screening, and education and training of mothers

These activities are ongoing and are expected to have a positive impact on the general health of infants in these regions and to contribute to a reduction in the risk of infant mortality in Saskatchewan.

KidsFirst Program Progress 2003-04





Saskatchewan's KidsFirst Program is a key initiative of the Departments of Learning, Health, Community Resources and Employment, and First Nations and Metis Relations. The program is designed to assist vulnerable families develop the capacity to nurture their children. KidsFirst provides comprehensive, research-based, strategic prevention and early intervention to families who are vulnerable due to their social and economic circumstances. Programming is available to pregnant women and families with children up to age five. Emphasis is also placed on the prevention of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

Nine targeted communities receive KidsFirst funding: Nipawin, Meadow Lake, Prince Albert, North Battleford, Yorkton, Regina, Saskatoon, Moose Jaw and the North. The provincial government sets policy and program direction, allocates funding, approves community plans, and tracks and reports on the expenditures and progress of the program. Intersectoral management committees operate in each community. They are responsible for the continued development, implementation, and operation of the KidsFirst Program.

Other communities have benefited from improved integration of existing services. Early Childhood Developers work with community stakeholders and partners to develop an inventory of currently available services, establish partnerships and protocols for referrals from the Birth Screening Program, determine the capacity of the community in providing services to those who are vulnerable, and assist the community in realignment of current services.

In 2003-04, KidsFirst developed its first Performance Plan (http://www.sasklearning.gov.sk.ca/branches/ecd/kids_first.shtml), which will be implemented in 2004-05. This strategy outlines a number of goals and objectives that will guide program efforts over the next several years; the Plan includes specific actions for 2004-05, and will continue to evolve over the next several years in response to emerging challenges and opportunities within communities.

Program Highlights

Participation in KidsFirst grew steadily in 2003-04, with 852 families participating in the program at year end, an increase of 180 families from March 31, 2003.

Hospitals in all the KidsFirst targeted communities were screening newborns and their families for KidsFirst eligibility. Screening was done on 81.6 percent of all births in the targeted communities. From October 2003 to March 2004, 556 families residing in the targeted areas were referred for assessments. one hundred and sixty pregnant women who were suspected of using alcohol and/or drugs were admitted to the program during that time period. On average, from October 2003 to March 2004, 52 new families were admitted to the program each month and 45 families left the program. Nearly 40 percent of the families who left the program did so because they moved outside the targeted area.

Client families, both pre- and post-natal, received support and education on early childhood development activities through the home-visiting component of the program. Families also had opportunities to participate in programs directed at early childhood development and learning. All KidsFirst targeted communities provided funding to enable enhancements to community-based early learning and care.

The child care and early learning components continued to grow. The KidsFirst targeted communities were allocated funding for the expansion of early learning spaces. Communities have the flexibility to provide enhanced services to existing spaces, rather than expansion, where appropriate to local needs.

Parent support programs continued in all of the target communities. Programs are based on parent-identified need and vary from community to community. These programs also serve to develop social support networks for these families. Many of the parent support programs are offered to the broader community. This allows families to build a larger support network and builds community capacity.

Working with parents to achieve their goals is a major component of the KidsFirst program. At least 112 KidsFirst parents returned to school to upgrade their education in fiscal year 2003-04. Increasing their education level ultimately leads to better chances for employment, income security, and self-esteem. Ultimately, this strengthens the family and promotes a more supportive and nurturing environment for their children.

2003-04 was a year of stabilization for the KidsFirst program. After the second full year of implementation, all sites were offering the core components of the program and many sites reached the maximum number of families they could accommodate. Communities gained experience working with an intersectoral management committee. Client families were making progress on their life challenges. By the end of 2003-04, the program was reaching service capacity, and many of the challenges faced during implementation are being addressed.

The Future - KidsFirst

The KidsFirst Information Management System will be implemented in 2004-05. The system will provide valuable management information at the site level and aggregate

information at the provincial level. The system will allow for reporting on current and future indicators. It will also provide the evidence to assess the effectiveness of the program and make adjustments to operations as required.

KidsFirst will increase its focus on the non-targeted areas of the province. This will include working toward implementation and utilization of the birth screening tool in all hospitals in the province. The non-targeted community development aspect of KidsFirst is a valuable component of the program, and supports community capacity across the province. For example, utilizing the information from the in-hospital screen allows the KidsFirst community developer to refer clients to appropriate and available services within their communities. As well, barriers to accessing existing services are identified and solutions to these barriers are implemented. In one area of the Province connections made with local school divisions and health region staff have led to the implementation of the KidsFirst developmental assessment tool in non-targeted areas.

KidsFirst Success Stories

From a supervisor:

Lelanna, a single mom, had problems working because of transportation, daycare issues and low self-esteem. She did not believe she was doing okay as a parent. Eighteen months later, Lelanna is working full-time, has her own transportation and is able to pay the parent portion of her daycare costs. She is confident and capable and has even been able to purchase a home. Best of all, she shared with her home visitor, she has learned about what's best for her child, and has confidence that she can help her child to reach her full potential.

From a home visitor:

In writing about the success of a family in the KidsFirst program, it is important to note that the measure of success may be very small and go almost unnoticed. But each week, little changes add up to bring about a bigger success at the end of a year.

The family that comes to my mind has two little girls. They were on social assistance and needed support in almost every aspect of their lives - transportation, finances, early learning, parenting, hygiene and cleanliness, marital and many other areas.

Over the past two years, this family has participated very enthusiastically in the KidsFirst program, rarely missing a visit or an activity. They are not on social assistance any longer and the dad has been working at a steady, full time job for over a year. They still have financial struggles, but they feel great to be self-sufficient. They have a new baby boy who is healthy in spite of being born three weeks premature. They have moved to slightly better housing. They still struggle with housekeeping and cleanliness but have a better awareness of the connection between hygiene and health. The kids were not hospitalized once this winter.

The KidsFirst program has helped this family with early learning by offering both a preschool program and weekly daycare for socialization and learning, as well as connecting them to speech and language therapy. The kids absolutely love their programs and look forward to them.

I see this family as having ongoing challenges, but I have seen wonderful changes develop in this family little by little.

From a program manager:

Success is marked by non-events. For example, a few births in the community have occurred and Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder (FASD) will not be a factor or will have a reduced impact in the newborns' lives. One of the moms introduces her latest child as the baby who does not have FASD.

From a home visitor:

This single mom was one of the first KidsFirst participants. She has three beautiful daughters. Some of the challenges for this family have been: suicide of a family member; drug addiction; abandonment by the fathers; stable housing; transportation; affordable daycare; and the mother's health.

KidsFirst has made a difference by providing social support through the home visitor, counselling services, assistance with daycare and transportation, and the opportunity to attend family support activities. This family has been successful. They now have a stable home. The mom has got clean and sober and is attending university. She is also giving back to KidsFirst by sitting on a daycare committee. The children are benefiting from structure and routine, as well as from having a mom who has set goals for the family's future. The girls are attending extra-curricular activities and everyone in the family is doing extremely well.

From a mental health worker:

I would like to share a story of one of our families. This is the story of a woman who, over the years, has done some tremendous work. She grew up in an environment that was very critical, and received very few positive messages. This environment kept her down rather than building her up. In an attempt to get away from this situation, she met a man and left with him, only to find that living with him was much like the old environment.

She found various ways to cope (alcohol, drugs and gambling) but none of these gave her the support she wanted. Over the past year, she has started to find herself and make choices that are positive. Last week, she called wanting to be seen immediately. She started the session by saying, "I can't cope with these good feelings!" She was feeling guilty about feeling good. She ended the session by stating, "It feels so good to feel alive." She continues to promise me that one day, in the very near future, she is going to "fire me." I can hardly wait!

From a program manager:

As I met with several of our agency partners to review our agreements and service delivery, I most certainly noticed a change in people's language and involvement. I heard more "we should," not "you should." I noted that when people talked about what needs to change, the focus was not on what didn't work, but rather on what could work better. It was very motivating and provided me with renewed energy as we enter a new year of planning.

From a KidsFirst mom:

Being a mother is one of the hardest jobs, but the most rewarding job ever. I never thought that having an organized house would help. Since I have kept my living room and kitchen organized, I feel organized in every way and better about me.

KidsFirst has helped me so much. My visitor has changed me and my life in so many ways. She helps reassure me. I'm starting a course in October and she is 100 per cent behind me, helping out with anything and everything. My visitor is more like a role model than anything. I enjoy every visit with her. She brings over interesting parenting, relationship, and self esteem pamphlets.

The Path Forward - Early Childhood Development

In 2003-04, the KidsFirst Strategic Plan was significantly refined to guide future development of the program. Performance measures were developed for 2004-05 in the KidsFirst Performance Plan that was released with the 2004-05 budget. The goals and objectives will guide efforts and specific actions towards objectives over the next several years.

The Strategic Plan is multi-year and will continue to evolve in response to emerging challenges and opportunities in communities, the overall effectiveness of the KidsFirst Program, and feedback received from partners in communities and from participating families. Data is currently being gathered on KidsFirst program activity. The initial development of an information management system will be completed in 2004-05. This system will be implemented as a management tool for the KidsFirst targeted sites and will provide broad information to guide the future development of the program.

Fiscal year 2004-05 will be an exciting one for Early Childhood Development in Saskatchewan. The Government will continue to focus on the needs of vulnerable children and families through the KidsFirst program and School^{PLUS}. As well, the Province will continue its commitment to Early Learning and Care through further development of quality child care and early learning opportunities in Saskatchewan and additional work growing out of the Early Learning and Child Care Multilateral Agreement of March 2003.

The overall Early Childhood Development goal remains clear: to provide all children with the best possible start in life and to ensure that families have the tools they need to meet this goal.

Working Together with Saskatchewan Learning

Support for vulnerable children does not end when they begin school. School^{PLUS} is a Government of Saskatchewan initiative, begun in 2001, designed to strengthen the capacity of schools and to improve the educational outcomes for every Saskatchewan child. Within School^{PLUS}, schools are seen as key hubs of community life that can offer supports to families and children from the pre-school years through to the transition to adulthood. This is done by more actively involving family and community members to help provide all children and young people with the supports they need for healthy development and learning success. Supports may include health, nutrition, recreation, culture, social and justice services for children and their families, as well as advanced learning opportunities for adults.

By keeping all children in school and helping each child achieve educational success, improved life outcomes can be assured for many children and families who now live on the margins of mainstream society.

The Early Childhood Development Strategy and School^{PLUS} are all part of a continuum which aims to raise healthy, engaged and socially responsible citizens.

Visit: www.sasklearning.gov.sk.ca or www.schoolplus.gov.sk.ca

Summary of Investments - 2003-04

The fiscal year 2003-04 saw the further development of the ECD Strategy, particularly the KidsFirst program. By fiscal year end, all targeted communities had fully implemented the program.

The KidsFirst non-targeted communities are also provided funding in order to implement universal new-born screening in all hospitals across the province and work with local service providers to enhance the integration and responsiveness of existing programs.

The following table outlines the changes in investment from 2002-03 to 2003-04 for the ECD Strategy. All of the programs funded are incremental since 2000-01. The ECD funding is in addition to the baseline program funding outlined in the 'Update on Early Childhood Development 2000-01' report on Saskatchewan's Action Plan for Children. To the end of 2003-04, the incremental expenditure on the ECD Strategy, provided through the ECD Agreement was $6,324,600 in 2001-02, $9,004,398 in 2002-03, and $12,758,803 in 2003-04, for a total expenditure of $28,087,801 over three years.

Program Area	2002-03	2003-04
KidsFirst		
Non-Targeted Communities	0*	618,000
• Universal newborn screening		
• Realignment of existing programs		
Targeted Communities	6,753,469	9,805,327
• Prenatal screening and outreach		
• Birth screening and assessment		
• Home visiting		
• Mental Health and Addictions		
• Enhanced child care		
• Early learning programs		
• Parenting supports		
Program Support	590,429**	676,897
Child Care	1,019,000	1,019,000
• Training, wage enhancement and start up grants		
Early Intervention Spaces	370,000	370,000
PreKindergarten Programs	200,000	200,000
Infant Mortality Initiatives	71,500	70,000
TOTAL	$ 004,398	12,758,803

*Expenditures for 2002-03 were expensed in 2001-02.

**The figure reported in the 2002-03 Progress Report was $646,001.

Investments in Early Learning and Care

In their March 2003 Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care, Ministers Responsible for Social Services agreed to report annually to Canadians on their progress in improving access to affordable, quality early learning and child care programs and services.

As part of this commitment, they agreed to begin their reporting with a baseline report outlining expenditures and programs in place during 2002-03. The information provided in this report provides the increase from the 2002-03 baseline.

1. Spaces

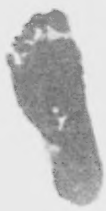
Child Care:	2002-03	2003-04
Number of licensed centres:	138	153
Number of licensed centre spaces:	5,123	5,540

Type of Space:

Infants:	357	452
Toddlers:	980	1,129
Preschool:	2,949	3,085
School Age:	837	874
Total:	**5,123**	**5,540**

Number of licensed family child care homes:	277	291
Number of licensed family child care spaces:	2,160	2,370
Total Number Of Licensed Child Care Spaces*:	**7,283**	**7,910**

**63 designated as KidsFirst spaces*



Prekindergarten:

Number of programs*:	89*	104*

**Includes four programs financed through federal ECD serving 61 children and families.*

Number of spaces:	1,300*	1,661*

**Based on an average of 16 spaces per program.*

Early Entrance Designated Disabled Pupil Program

Number of children:	289	307

2. Child Care Subsidy	2002-03	2003-04
Average number of subsidies:	3,353	3,408
Average monthly subsidy:	$241.92	$254.64
Total Subsidy:	**$ 9,409,000**	**$10,414,000**

3. Grants

Early Learning Programs:

Prekindergarten:	4,000,000*#	4,662,836*#
Early Entrance Designated Disabled Pupil Program:	2,800,000*	2,811,190*

**Expenditures are cost shared by School Divisions through the local tax base and the Government of Saskatchewan through the Foundation Operating Grant.*

#$200,000 of the Prekindergarten allocation is contributed by federal ECD funding.

Grants For Child Care Programs:

Early Childhood Services Grants: * Plus $869,000 ECD	4,443,773*	5,271,737*
Teen Support Grants:	740,920	873,284
Preschool Support Grants:	503,950	507,551
Start Up Grants: * Plus $15,000 ECD	154,500*	206,080*
Home Equipment/Programming Grants: * Plus $50,000 ECD	143,434*	134,090*
Special Northern Allowances:	27,760	
Community Solutions Grants (rural, workplace, special needs, etc.):	611,363	701,662
Training /Education Grants: * Plus $85,000 ECD	1,260*	4,393*
Special Needs Grants:	1,460,358	1,606,358
Total Child Care Grants: *** Plus $1,019,000 ECD**	**8,087,318***	**9,674,451***

Child Care Administration

Administration (licensing and subsidy):	$1,816,000	2,013,983

Appendix A - KidsFirst

Goals and Objectives

The KidsFirst Strategy is evolving to reflect the realities of program delivery and to ensure the tracking of an increasing number of indicators. Further refinements to improve the ability of the program to track outcomes will continue over the next several years. At the beginning of 2004-05 key actions are identified for each of the goals, and these actions will be reported on at 2004-05 year end. This report can be accessed at: http://www.sasklearning.gov.sk.ca/branches/ecd/KidsFirst_plan04_05.pdf

Vision:

Children living in very vulnerable circumstances enjoy a good start in life and are nurtured and supported by caring families and communities. In targeted high-needs communities, supports and services are provided through partnerships between families, communities, service organizations and governments.

Goal 1:

Children in very vulnerable situations are born and remain healthy

- ***Objective 1:*** Pregnant women in the program access adequate prenatal care
- ***Objective 2:*** Primary caregivers address their mental health and addiction issues
- ***Objective 3:*** Children maintain good physical health status or improved health status over time.

Goal 2:

Children living in very vulnerable circumstances are supported and nurtured by healthy, well functioning families

- ***Objective 1:*** Social support networks, housing, food security, education, employment and income for families will improve over time
- ***Objective 2:*** Family interactions improve over time

- ***Objective 3:*** Families develop and maintain a safe and secure home environment

Goal 3:

Children living in very vulnerable situations are supported to maximize their ability to learn, thrive and problem solve within their inherent capacity

- ***Objective 1:*** Support and nurture children's ability to learn

Goal 4:

Children living in very vulnerable situations are appropriately served by KidsFirst Program and Supports

- ***Objective 1:*** Establish and maintain shared accountability mechanisms for processes and outcomes
- ***Objective 2:*** Create and maintain a service system for early childhood development that uses a community development approach, is built on existing services, and is integrated, comprehensive, innovative, flexible and inclusive
- ***Objective 3:*** Identify appropriate families in a timely manner and retain them in the program
- ***Objective 4:*** Families are satisfied with KidsFirst services

Early Childhood Development First Ministers' Meeting Communiqué

On September 11, 2000, the Government of Canada, provincial and territorial governments reached a historic agreement on early childhood development.

The full text is available at: http://www.scics.gc.ca/cinfo00/800038005_e.html

Early Learning and Child Care

On March 13, 2003, Federal, Provincial, and Territorial Ministers Responsible for Social Services agreed on a framework for improving access to affordable, quality, provincially and territorially regulated early learning and child care programs and services.

The full text is available at: http://www.scics.gc.ca/cinfo03/830779005_e.html

For further information, contact:

Early Childhood Development

Saskatchewan Learning
2220 College Avenue, First Floor
Regina, Saskatchewan
S4P 3V7

PHONE: 1 (306) 787-5077
FAX: 1 (306) 798-0787

www.sasked.gov.sk.ca